FRANK READE

WEEKLY MAGAZINE,

Containing Stories of Adventures on Land, Sea & in the Air.

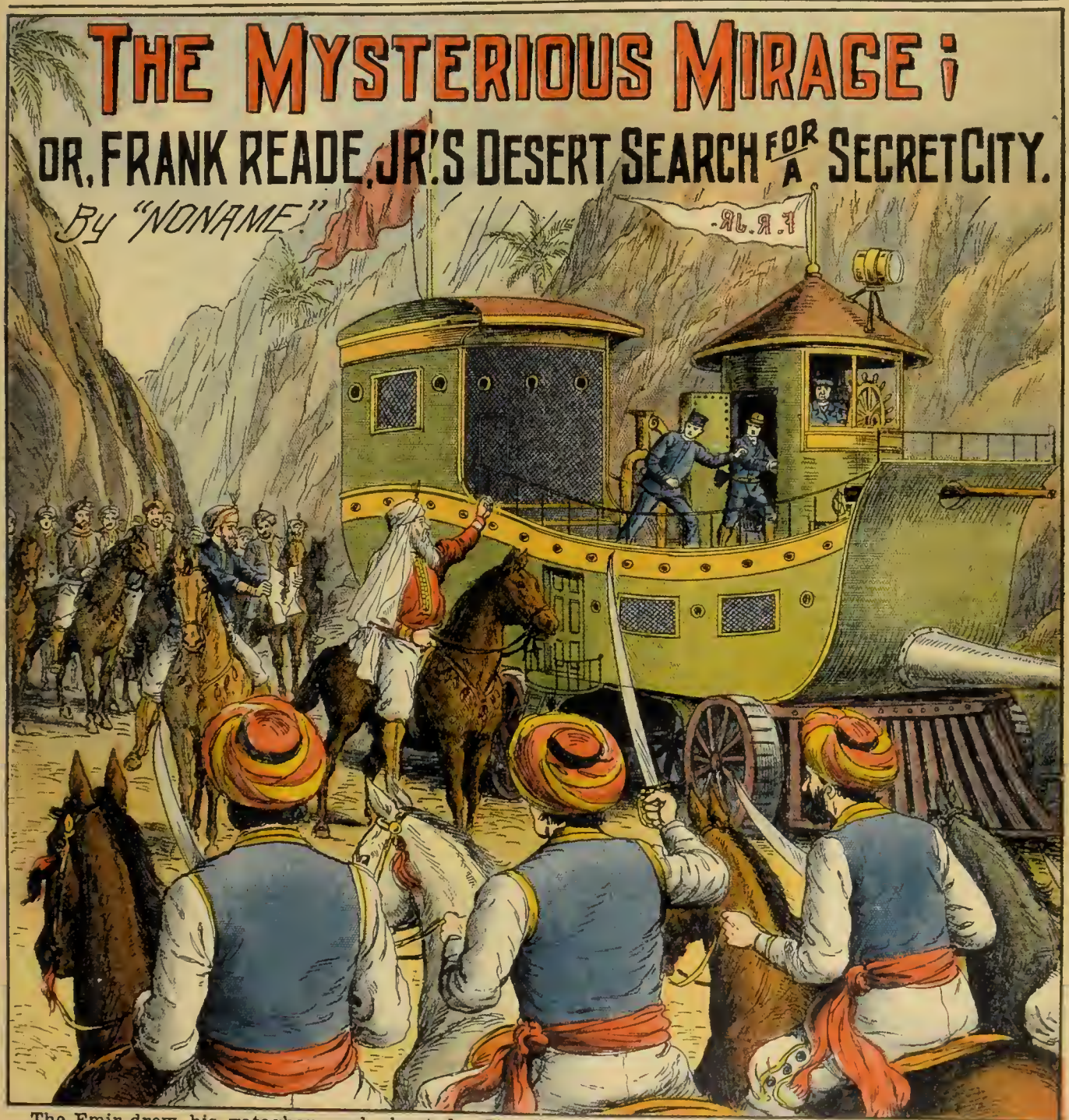
Issued Weekly—By Subscription $2.50 per year. Application made for Second-Class Entry at N. Y. Post Office.

No. 60. NEW YORK. DECEMBER 18, 1903. Price 5 Cents.

THE MYSTERIOUS MIRAGE;

OR, FRANK READE, JR.'S DESERT SEARCH FOR A SECRET CITY.

By "NONAME."



The Emir drew his yataghan and shouted: "You have no passports, and are trespassers in the sacred land of Mahomet. For this, prepare to die!" "Into the cabin—quick!" cried Frank. They were none too fast.

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(Continued on page 3 of cover.)

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CHAPTER I.

COLONEL DUSTIN'S STORY.

Colonel Harland Dustin sat in the lobby of the Fifth Avenue Hotel smoking a fine Havana cigar with all the relish of a born tobacco user and traveler in all climes of the world.

A little knot of men, among whom were an author, two editors, and a couple of the inevitable reporters, were about him and listening to his chat about life in the Great Desert of Northern Africa.

For the colonel had just returned from a sojourn of two years in and about the Sahara.

"I tell you," he said, impressively, "that few people can understand what a mighty expanse of burning sand that is. There is no other spot on the face of the earth like it."

"Indeed," said one of the editors, relaxing his usual cynicism; "I imagine you are a good judge, colonel."

"I ought to be," admitted the colonel. "I have visited all corners of the earth."

"That is your license," declared the author. "Is not the Sahara a great field for exciting incident?"

"Well, I found it so," agreed the colonel; "in fact, it is a place where you never need to seek incident, for it is continually seeking you."

"Speaking of that," said one of the reporters, with an eye to a newspaper "story," "what was the most exciting incident you met with there?"

The colonel had no need for thought.

He promptly replied:

"The mysterious mirage."

At this answer all crowded somewhat nearer to the colonel and listened attentively.

For they knew something good was coming.

This blase traveler, this seeker of adventure, would be sure to launch nothing of the stale order. It would be something worth listening to.

The colonel took one whiff at his cigar, and then resumed:

"In that part of the desert called Bikan by the Bedouins, because it is very like a spirit land with its mysterious manifestations, there may be seen a mirage of most wonderful sort.

"It is the mirage of a city, the like of which for archi-

feeture or flowering gardens, was never seen on earth. Now, you all know what a mirage is.

"It is a curious and faithful photograph of Nature, in the misty sky, of some distant plain, valley, mountain, or town, or perchance a body of water.

"The mirage of Bikan, however, has never been identified. No one has been able to tell the name of the beautiful city or its secret location. That still remains a mystery which no effort has ever solved.

"Thousands of travelers, Europeans and natives as well, have applied all sorts of calculations to locate the wonderful city.

"Could it once be located, it would no doubt be the wonder of the world, for no other like it is known, no other people of the same appearance have ever been. This mirage of Bikan I consider as one of the most wonderful things I came across in the desert."

The listeners were breathless with intense interest for a moment.

Then the author said:

"Could you really distinguish the people? Might it not be a transferred reproduction from another planet?"

"It must have been a wonderful spectacle," commented an editor.

But it remained for the acute reporter to get at the meat in the nut.

"A mirage is supposed to be a natural phenomenon, major. Is it possible for a mystical city, or one not in existence, to be portrayed?"

"No," replied the colonel, promptly. "A mirage is a reproduction and must have a pattern or subject in actual existence."

"In that case such a city must really exist."

"Of course."

"How far is it possible for a mirage to draw its subject from? What is the greatest known distance?"

"Probably from no point beyond the horizon at its altitude," was the reply. "The mirage of Bikan may hang a thousand feet in the air."

"Then the wonderful city must be somewhere within a radius of three or four hundred miles."

"I should say so."

The author was thinking of the resurrection of some old-time city of romance, and already pictured a Prince Charming and a Sleeping Beauty.

The editor was wondering if the subject would be trite for his readers, but the reporter already saw the matter up in cold types with bold headlines.

"Now," resumed the reporter, "why cannot this city be found? Extend the radius another hundred miles. Has not all that region been explored?"

"Presumably, time and again," replied the colonel. "And yet no trace of the mirage city can be found."

The reporter scratched his head with his pencil.

"I wish I had the chance," he said. "I'd bet a new hat I could find it."

The colonel laughed.

"I advise your syndicate to send you out there," he said. "It would be the biggest job they could put up."

"I vow I'll approach them on the matter," declared the scribe; "but let me tell you something."

"Well?"

"The mere publication of this story so interestingly narrated by you is bound to interest the whole country. Probably a hundred men of genius will have their cupidity excited to such an extent, that they will at once set out to discover the city."

"No danger of their meeting with success," said the colonel.

"Why?"

"It is impossible."

"You forget."

"What?"

"Nothing is impossible to an out-and-out American."

Colonel Dustin bit his cigar in two and took a keen glance at the scribe. He saw a smooth-faced, studious-looking young fellow, but a single glance at his keen penetrating eyes and high classical forehead showed that he was a man of no ordinary power.

"You have the advantage of me——" began the colonel.

"Theo Wilton, at your service," replied the reporter, with a low bow, "American News Syndicate."

"You know me?"

"Colonel Dustin."

"Exactly. I am glad to meet you, Mr. Wilton. But I want to talk with you further. Will you honor me with your presence at my room to-night at eight?"

The scribe bowed.

Col. Dustin arose.

The author entered into a surprisingly friendly colloquy with one of the editors.

Theo Wilton was absorbed in his newspaper story.

Col. Dustin entered the elevator, which is the American dialect for "lift," and was soon on his way to his room.

"By Jove!" reflected Wilton, as he placed his note book in his pocket, "this is not a bad day's work. The syndicate ought to pay me a hundred for that. Hello! another chance!"

Wilton started pell-mell for the reading-room.

A man whom he instantly recognized entered it. Wilton overtook him.

He was a young man, but of remarkably distinguished appearance.

His face was well-chiseled and handsome, and supremely intellectual.

"I beg pardon," said Wilton, politely. "Mr. Frank Reade, Jr., I believe?"

The young man turned.

"That is my name," he said.

"Here is my card. I represent the American News Syndicate."

"Ah!" said Frank Reade, Jr., glancing at the card, "I am afraid I have little material for you."

"I can't believe that, Mr. Reade," said Wilton, eagerly. "You will grant me a brief interview; then I will tell you something of interest."

"Very well," said Frank Reade, Jr., sinking into a chair. "Please be brief."

"How about the new invention you were at work on the last time I was up in Readestown?"

"It is finished."

"What? The New Overland Chaise?"

"Even so."

Wilton knew that the young man before him was one of the most famous persons on the earth.

He was the greatest of living inventors, and the fruits of his genius were indeed wonderful.

And now by his own confession he had just finished an Electric Overland Chaise.

What this vehicle was like only the inventor and his workmen could tell. It was kept a profound secret.

For a moment Wilton was too full of the daring resolve upon his mind to speak.

Then he managed to ask:

"What programme have you outlined, Mr. Reade? What will be your first trip with your Overland Chaise?"

"Well, I have hardly decided," replied Frank. "I am anxious to visit some unknown and unexplored part of the world."

"You are?" cried the reporter, eagerly.

"Yes."

Wilton could hardly contain himself.

"Mr. Reade," he said, "I have something remarkable to tell you."

"Indeed!" he exclaimed. "What may it be, sir?"

Then the reporter told the story of the mysterious mirage.

Frank Reade, Jr., was intensely interested.

"On my word!" he cried. "that is a bewitching story, and if true——"

"The man who tells it is in the hotel at this moment."

"Indeed!"

"Suppose we send up our cards? He will grant us an interview; that is, if you——"

"I understand," replied Frank. "The Sahara is just the field for the Overland Chaise. We will talk with Colonel Dustin."

Cards were sent up. A few moments later the messenger returned and said:

"Colonel Dustin requests the gentlemen to come to his rooms."

CHAPTER II.

THE ELECTRIC CHAISE.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Wilton at once entered the elevator.

In a few seconds they were in the upper regions of the hotel. Then they were at the door of Colonel Dustin's room.

The colonel himself greeted them warmly. It did not take Wilton long to divulge the object of the visit.

"Mr. Reade is the inventor of the Overland Chaise," he said. "I told him as nearly as I could remember your story of the mysterious mirage."

"Yes," said the colonel.

"He is deeply interested and has thought of taking a trip to the Sahara. This seems to offer him an object, and at the same time an adventure."

Colonel Dustin tossed his cigar into the grate.

He advanced and stood before both his visitors.

"Mr. Reade," he said with suppressed excitement, "is it possible to travel safely through the enemy's country with your new machine?"

"You mean," said Frank, "is it impervious to an ordinary attack."

"Just so."

"I may say that it is. It was constructed for just such a purpose as this of traveling in perilous countries. I have made every provision and have every kind of a weapon aboard for either offense or defense."

The colonel was much excited.

"Then it can be done!" he cried. "I see the way it can be done. That is all settled. The city of the mysterious mirage will be found, let me tell you."

In some excitement the colonel seated himself and went on:

"Every kind of an effort has been made to find the mirage city. That it exists there is no doubt."

"But it lies, I believe, in some mountains south of Bikan, and where hostile tribes have kept explorers from penetrating.

"With such a machine as yours no doubt three or four men could travel with impunity through all that region."

"They can," assented Frank.

"Then you will undertake it?"

"I will consider the plan. I must first go back to Readestown before giving an answer."

"Think of what a mighty discovery it will be for science and for the world!" cried the colonel enthusiastically. "Who knows but that this may be the city and region of Ophir described by Solomon, and which no man has ever located! What a wonderful thing it will be to give the world a city and a new race of people, who have undoubtedly been undiscovered for centuries."

The colonel was eagerly enthusiastic over the matter.

Wilton was the same.

But Frank Reade, Jr., treated the matter coolly and practically. Finally he rose and said:

"I will return to Readestown to-night."

"And how soon shall we have your answer?" asked the colonel eagerly.

"I will wire you day after to-morrow, which is Thursday."

This ended the confab.

But for two days Colonel Dustin and Theo Wilton were in suspense.

"I must beg leave to go on this expedition in the interest of the press," said the young reporter.

"And I in the cause of science," declared the colonel.

"I trust he will not refuse us."

"He will not."

Then for the hundredth time they discussed the feasibility of the whole scheme.

But still they were in supreme suspense until the afternoon of the second day.

Then a messenger entered the hotel with a bundle of messages. One of these was for Colonel Dustin.

The colonel broke the seal and hastily read:

COLONEL DUSTIN, Fifth Avenue Hotel,—

I have decided to go. The Chaise, packed in sections, will be placed aboard the first Mediterranean steamer. Of course you and Wilton will accompany me? Yours,

FRANK READE, JR.

So delighted were both the colonel and the reporter that they could have stood on their heads for joy.

"Of course you and Mr. Wilton will accompany me?" repeated Wilton. "Will we? Well, I should say so. I tell you that Mr. Reade is a brick! By Jupiter, just think of it, colonel! Across the Sahara with Frank Reade, Jr.!"

Neither would have exchanged positions that moment with the King of Italy or any other country.

"We had better get ready at once," declared the colonel.

"It won't take me long."

"Nor me."

"When shall we go to Readestown?"

"Can you be ready to-morrow?"

"To-night, if necessary. A newspaper man is never unready."

"I believe you are right," declared the colonel. "Well, we will start early in the morning."

So the matter was settled.

The Overland Chaise was to make its initial trip in quest of the Secret City of the mysterious mirage.

In Readestown, that beautiful little city among the hills, all was bustle and excitement.

Frank Reade, Jr.'s first move upon arriving home was to visit the great high arched storehouse where the new machine was set up.

It was quite complete, and only needed to be equipped with provisions to start at once.

Upon entering the yard Frank was met by a comical negro and a shock-headed Irishman.

"Golly, Marse Frank, glad fo' to see yo' back!" cried the negro.

"The top av the marnin' to yez, Misther Frank!" declared the Celt.

"The same to you, Barney and Pomp," replied the young inventor.

Barney and Pomp were old and faithful servitors. They had been long in the employ of Frank's father before him.

"Shure phwat brought yez back from New York so soon, Misther Frank?" asked Barney.

"I have some work cut out for the Chaise," replied Frank; "is she in good trim?"

"Shure, sor, as foine and fit as a fiddle."

"That is good."

"Phwativer will be the thrip, sor?"

"To the Sahara."

"Shure, sor——"

"Oh, the Great Desert, I mean," replied Frank. "That is in the northern part of Africa, you know."

"Shure, it's gettin' to be the fashion to visit Afriky since

Stanley wint there;" and then the Celt turned mischievously to Pomp.

"Begorra, there's a chance for yez to renew acquaintance wid some av yer relatives, naygur!"

"Look yer, Irish!" cried the darky, hotly, "don' yo' insult me! I was bo'n in ole Ca'line, an' don' yo' forgit it! All my relatives lib dar, an' dey ain' no bog-trotters, neither!"

Barney shook his fiery hair like a mad bull.

"Phwat's that relliction on the bog-trotthers?" he cried. "Don't ye git gay wid me, naygur! Shure, divil a bit am I ashamed av the soil av me nativity! Here's luck to the Emeraid Oisle!"

Frank saw that they were perilously near a ruction, of which both were fond, so he put a stop to the affair by saying sharply:

"Be off with you, rascals, and open up the storehouse. I want to take a look at the Chaise."

Barney turned a handspring and Pomp went nimbly off on his hands. In a few moments Frank's order had been obeyed.

The storehouse was open.

There in plain view was the latest triumph of the young inventor's fertile brain.

There was the Overland Chaise.

Let us look at it.

The Chaise was a handsome vehicle, mounted upon light gear, and four rubber-tired wheels. These were of steel throughout.

The body of the vehicle was graceful in contour, with a high dasher in front and a canopy, much like the cover of a chaise, in the rear.

This was provided with steel curtains which would shut the canopy up bullet-proof if desired. There was a steel-screened window in each side.

In each side of the Chaise there were also three plate-glass windows. Also a row of loop-holes.

The body of the Chaise was of steel, nicely burnished. In its side was a door leading out upon a small platform. Thence a rope ladder led to the ground.

The upper part of the Chaise was a deck, in the center of which rose the exposed parts of the electrical machinery which gave power to the Chaise.

This was guarded by a steel rail, as was also the gun-deck forward of the pilot-house.

Here was the pneumatic electric gun, a long tube of thin steel with some curious air-chambers.

The gun was Frank Reade, Jr.'s own invention, and most deadly.

It would throw a dynamite projectile over a mile with fatal effect.

Upon the roof of the pilothouse there was a powerful searchlight, which was of great value.

The interior of the Chaise was an illustration of the possibility of thorough furnishing in a limited space.

The cabin was elegantly draped and upholstered.

There were little recesses in the wall, where were shelves of rare books, or articles needed upon a long journey.

To attempt a detailed description of the machine would be lengthy and tedious.

Therefore we will content ourselves with this somewhat incomplete account of the Chaise.

Of course its motive power was electricity from a motor and battery system, which was the peculiar invention of Frank Reade, Jr.,

The Overland Chaise was all ready for the journey save the storing away of provisions.

This was accomplished in quick time, and all preparations were completed for the most famous trip upon which the party ever went.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE SAHARA.

Colonel Dustin and Wilton, the reporter, arrived in Readestown just on time.

They were the first privileged outsiders to view the Chaise. It is needless to say that they waxed exceedingly enthusiastic over it, and the colonel cried:

"You have conferred honor untold upon us, Mr. Reade, in allowing us to accompany you."

"I am glad of your company," said Frank, honestly. "Certainly it would be dreary work enough to visit the Sahara alone."

The Chaise had been taken apart and stored in sections aboard a freight car bound for New York City.

There it was to be transferred to the hold of a steamer bound for Suez and the Mediterranean.

The voyagers themselves took a fast express train for New York, where they arrived somewhat in advance of the Chaise.

Of course reports of the projected trip had spread, and when the party reached the big city they were literally besieged by newspaper men.

Frank brought with him from Readestown skilled work-

men enough to put the machine together when Suez should be reached.

These were to return aboard the steamer on her homeward voyage.

So all arrangements were made, and finally the hour for the start came.

The Chaise was safely stored in the steamer's hold.

Captain Partridge, of the Prince Leon, as the vessel was named, ordered the gangplank hauled in and she swung out from the pier.

A large crowd were on the wharf to see the departure.

Out into the Bay, past the Bartholdi Light and Fort Hamilton the steamer sailed.

Soon she had cleared Sandy Hook and the great ocean voyage was begun.

To dwell upon the incidents of that voyage would be irrelevant, and would be of little interest to the reader.

Therefore, let us pass on over the ocean voyage, through the Straits of Gibraltar and to the Suez.

Here the party were transferred to a smaller steamer bound for a small port in the Red Sea.

Here it was that the landing was made.

The Chaise was put together by the workmen. At last the great journey was really begun.

Frank had passports from the Khedive which would assure him the right to travel anywhere in Egypt.

The native officials respected these at the point of disembarkation, but a French consul who was present said:

"Monsieur Reade, those will do very well here, but in the interior they will be of little value."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank; "is not the Khedive's word law in Egypt?"

"To a certain extent, yes, monsieur. But the tribes of the Sahara are mostly lawless and respect no Government. It will be better for you not to trust them."

"Indeed, I thank you for the kind hint," said Frank; "and I will certainly respect it. But I think that we shall be capable of taking care of ourselves once we get into the desert."

"I have no doubt of it, monsieur," agreed the consul.

Barney and Pomp were busy aboard the Chaise getting things into apple-pie order.

"Golly, Fish!" said the darky, with a comical grimace; "wha' yo' fink ob dis country anyway?"

"Begorra, I niver want to think av it," said the Celt, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Shure it's the worst culd wilderness I ever seed."

"Ki-yi, den yo' don' fink youse gwine to like de climate?"

Barney scraped the perspiration from his brow and replied:

"Bad cess to the climate! Shure, there's no country on earth equal to the ould sod. War yez iver in Oireland, naygur?"

"Kain't say dat I was, chile."

"Bejabers, then half av yer loife is wasted. Shure, it's the foinest place on earth. Divil a snake will yez foind there!"

"Golly, dat am de place fo' me," cried Pomp, who was mortally afraid of snakes. "Am dere any culled people in that country?"

"Moighty few," replied Barney; "but there's the Oirish, an' that's betther. Shure, there's no place loike Oireland. It's sorry I am fer yez that yez ain't an Oirishman!"

"Huh!" sniffed Pomp. "I don' know 'bout dat. Wha's de mattah wif de culled people?"

Barney made a grimace.

"Av I wuz as black as yez," he cried, "shure, I'd take off me skhin an' grow a new one. Och, the naygurs ain't to be compared wid de Oirish."

Pomp spat on his hands.

"What dat yo' say?" he cried energetically, "don' yo' go frowin' slops on de culled people. Mebbe dere skins ain' white, but dey warn't bo'n in no bog cabins, an' dey kin hold dere own any time. Jes' yo' show me a nigger dot kain't whip an Irishman out ob his boots any time.

"Whurroo! Phwat's that yez say?" roared Barney. "Shure, wan Oirishman cud whip a whole rigiment of naygurs! Av yez don't think so, thry a leetle ruction wid Barney O'Shea!"

"Golly, dat wud jes' be a heap ob fun!" cried Pomp. "Does yo' gib me de challenge, Fish?"

"Shure, take it how yez plaze!"

"A'right, den! Look out fo' yo'se'f! I'se a-comin'!"

And quick as a flash Pomp lowered his head and made a dive at the Celt.

Barney dodged the attack and grasped Pomp by the hips. Then the two jokers closed.

They were having a lively ruction when Frank appeared on the scene and put a stop to it.

The Red Sea port was left rapidly behind as the Chaise struck out into the Egyptian country.

Frank, with Colonel Duston and Wilton, stood on the main deck watching the country as they sped on rapidly through it.

Barney was in the pilot-house and Pomp in the galley.

The Chaise rolled on over the short green turf which here adorned the rolling country.

Through groves of olives and oaks, past orchards of figs and fields of corn the machine ran.

The humble dwellings of the agricultural Egyptians were the only buildings of note encountered for many miles.

Then occasionally they encountered heaps of ruins and leveled structures of ancient times.

Only a brief inspection was accorded these.

The machine kept rapidly on to the southward.

As they progressed large towns, even cities, were discovered. They were following a highway one day through a deep pass when they were suddenly brought to a halt in an unexpected and somewhat startling manner.

Barney, who was in the pilot-house, saw the defile suddenly fill with a band of mounted and armed men.

Dustin, who was an old Egyptian traveler, cried:

"They are the janizaries of an Emir's guard. The Emir himself must be in the train."

It was clearly impossible for the machine to go ahead without mowing down dozens of the janizaries, so Barney stopped it.

The janizaries formed instantly a solid line.

They blocked the pass with drawn swords and evidently regarded the Chaise with amazement.

The captain of the guard shouted some unintelligible commands and then rode out in advance of the troop.

"What does he want?" exclaimed Frank. "Have we not a right of way in this pass?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Dustin; "but we have got to convince these fellows of it, and if they are as wooden-headed as some I have met with, that will not be easy."

"They will not dare to detain us in face of the passports, will they?" asked Frank.

"I don't know. Time will answer that."

"Very good. Let us see."

Frank and the colonel showed themselves upon the forward part of the Chaise. At once the captain rode nearer and saluted.

He addressed Frank in the Turkish language.

The young inventor was not very adept in this, so he replied in French. Fortunately the captain of the guard understood.

"How is this, great Effendi!" cried the captain. "Do you invade the Emir's country with an armed chariot?"

"We come with a warrant," replied Frank. "We seek to do no one harm. Our errand is that of peace."

"Yet you are dogs of Christians, and this is the land of Mahomet. You must not desecrate it!"

"Pig-headed, illiterate scoundrel!" muttered the colonel. "Show him the passports."

Frank accordingly assumed a bolder stand, and shouted:

"You detain us at your peril. We have passports from the Khedive, and your heads will pay for detaining us!"

For a moment the captain of the guard was silent. He was evidently incredulous.

Then he replied:

"The Khedive gives no passports to Christians. You utter a lie."

"Don't you tell me that, or I'll blow you into eternity," retorted Frank angrily. "Come here and I will show you the passports."

The captain of the guard rode up to the side of the Chaise.

He was a dark-browed, evil-looking fellow. He glanced at the passport and his face changed.

Frank read him through and through.

He saw that he feared the Khedive's word, but at the same time was loth to obey it.

It was evident from the expression of his face that he was casting about for some plan by which to evade it.

Seeing this, Frank put in a clincher.

"You will trouble us at your peril. We are under the protection of the great Khedive."

A sudden thought seemed to come to the fellow. He turned and galloped to the rear of the train.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EMIR'S DEFEAT.

What was meant by this move our travelers could only guess.

But an explanation came quickly.

The line of janizaries parted and a patriarchal old fellow, in rich robes and mounted on a splendid Arab charger, came down through.

"The Emir!" exclaimed Dustin.

It was the Emir, and as he rode nearer he regarded the Chaise with evident interest and surprise.

He reined his horse in haughtily and accosted Frank in French.

"Dogs of Christians," he said, tartly, "what do you in the land sacred to Mahomet?"

"We are under the protection of the Khedive," replied Frank.

"That is false!" declared the Emir, hotly. "The Khedive permits no infidels to travel through his country."

"You are wrong," said Frank, coolly; "here are our passports."

The young inventor produced the documents, which were imposing in appearance and bore a large seal.

The Emir took them and his face changed as he recognized the Khedive's hand and seal.

For a moment he was irresolute. It was an authority greater than his own and he was for a time disposed to yield to it.

But he glanced again at the Chaise and his Moslem ire was once more raised.

It angered him to see a party of the hated Christians traveling with immunity and under the Khedive's protection through his country.

For a few moments he was irresolute. He tingered the documents in a nervous manner.

"Mahomet's true followers can scarce sanction this act of the Khedive?" he said, defiantly.

But Dustin caught the cue quickly and cried:

"What! Are you a traitor to the Khedive! Those words carried to his ears would cost you your head, Sir Emir!"

The Moslem dignitary turned a trifle pale, and involuntarily shivered. Then he made a move as if to return the passports, when the captain of the janizaries caught his arm.

A few hurried and excited words changed the complexion of everything.

Swift as thought the Emir passed the documents to the captain of the guard, who tore them into fragments.

No sooner had this astounding act been performed than the Emir drew his yataghan and shouted:

"Now, dogs of Christians, we have you at our mercy! You have no passports, and are trespassers in the sacred land of Mahomet. For this prepare to die!"

The amazement of our travelers at this act of treachery can hardly be conceived.

"On my word," cried Colonel Dustin, "that is the dirtiest trick I ever heard of."

"Into the cabin—quick!" cried Frank.

They were none too soon.

Bullets rattled against the steel sides of the Chaise. The Moslems were dead in earnest.

The defile bristled with them, and it was evident that they meant to attack the Chaise.

No time was to be lost.

Frank gave hurried orders.

A battle was certain.

Barney and Pomp, with rifles went into the pilot-house and opened fire upon the foe.

But Frank sprung to the electric gun. He knew that unless the battle came to close quarters they could clear the defile of the foe.

Bullets were rattling against the body of the Chaise like hail. It was a critical moment.

But our travelers did not falter. They kept their end up.

Barney and Pomp had kept up the liveliest kind of a fire. The Moslems were dropping right and left.

Inwardly Frank deprecated the affair.

He knew well enough that it would not fail to create bad blood, and that the real truth of the affair would never be repeated to the Khedive.

But the present exigency was one which could not be ignored.

It was necessary to take an aggressive stand and hold it.

Self-preservation is nature's first law, and our travelers had no intention whatever of yielding their necks to the keen scimiters of the Mahometans.

They had better die fighting valiantly than submit to execution. There was no division of sentiment on this point.

So the battle raged.

The Mahometans under the exhortations of the Emir made a headlong charge.

Barney and Pomp were now aided by Colonel Dustin and Wilton, the reporter.

This made quite a formidable force and they worked their repeaters for all they were worth.

Frank was at the electric gun.

He had placed a dynamite projectile in it, but hesitated to launch it into the horde of human beings.

He saw that the hot fire of the repeaters was likely to turn the tide. He never cared to needlessly take life.

A better plan occurred to him. He sighted the gun against a spur of the defile directly over the heads of the attacking Moslems.

"I'll give them a good fright," he muttered. "Maybe that will do just as well."

He knew that one shot from the gun would clear the defile, but he clung to his new plan.

Carefully sighting the gun, he pressed the electric button.

There was no report as the projectile left the muzzle of the gun. Only a slight recoil and a hissing sound.

But when the projectile struck the angle of the cliff, there was a roar like thunder.

It was as if a miniature earthquake was in progress. The angle of the cliff was shattered, and tons of dislodged rocks came tumbling down upon the affrighted Moslems.

It was impossible for them to control their horses, much less their own fears.

Up the defile, in a mad, excited mass, they surged. The Chaise proceeded after them.

"Follow them closely!" cried Frank, "don't give them a chance to rally!"

In vain the Emir tried to reform his men.

He might as well have tried to turn the sun backward in its course. The rout was effectual.

The end of the defile being reached, a remarkable stretch of country was presented to view.

It was a serrated plain covered with close cropped green grass. In places there were little clumps of palms.

In the foreground there was a ruined mosque. But beyond—what a spectacle!

It was like a mighty vista—a boundless space—like looking off to sea upon a clear day.

A great cry escaped the lips of the travelers. It was Colonel Dustin who exclaimed:

"It is the Desert!"

This was true.

This Great Desert lay before them, and our travelers regarded it with a species of awe.

It was the same great Sahara which countless multitudes had crossed for ages.

The same dreary, echoless plain of pitiless sand, beaten by the sun, and even now baking like a fiery furnace.

What stirring events—what great tragedies had been enacted upon its surface!

How many caravans lay yards beneath the sand drifts, victims of the dread simoon or hot sand storm?

The Emir's men were scattered like chaff before the wind.

They had sought refuge in the bleak hills about. Nothing more was to be feared from them.

So no further attention was paid to them. The travelers gave all their heed to the desert.

"We must cross that mighty expanse before reaching our destination," said Colonel Dustin. "If we were dependent upon slow camels I should not be sanguine of success."

"As it is, you apprehend no failure?" said Frank.

"I can't see how we can fail. The Chaise ought to run fast over the sand."

"She ought to," agreed Frank. "Undoubtedly she will."

"Bikan is on the lower verge of the desert," declared the colonel. "We ought to make it easy in a week."

"There is no need of dallying here."

"Not a bit."

"Will you give me the best course across the desert?"

Frank and the colonel went into the pilot house. With the aid of the big compass the course was set.

Then the Chaise left the green slope and glided out on the sands of the desert.

The Emir's men could not follow and were left behind. Soon naught was about them, but the boundless sea of sand.

It was rather a monotonous outlook, and yet the travelers studied it with interest.

There were some scenes which impressed all vividly.

Once they crossed the track of a caravan which had fallen a victim to the deadly sand storm.

A long heaped up mound, extending fully a mile, was seen. At intervals the sand was swept, and disclosed the bleaching bones of camels, horses, and even men.

The entire concourse had lain down to await the passing of the pitiless simoon.

Like many thousands before them they had succumbed to the pestilential and stifling atmosphere.

The fiery blast had withered them, and the desert claimed one more train of victims.

It was a ghastly thing to reflect upon. How many buried hopes and budding plans lay beneath that long mound of sand only the wise Creator could know.

Certainly their plans could never be carried out. Death, grim angel, had interfered with their consummation, as he is often in the habit of doing.

On the afternoon of the third day Barney, from the pilot-house, cried, in an excited manner:

"Come, all of yez. Shure, it's phwat they call an oasis, if I'm not misthaken. Wud yez luk at it!"

CHAPTER V.

ALI BABO.

An oasis in the great Sahara is certainly a sight to look upon.

The contrast between that glittering and pitiless array of sand, and the green waving palms was extremely marked.

As the oasis was directly in the path of the Chaise it was decided to visit it.

Every moment now it drew nearer. It was an island of green in the waste.

Its size was larger than the ordinary oasis and covered several square miles. A broad path led into its shady recesses.

As the machine ran into this, the voyagers caught a glimpse of a glimmering pool in the shadows.

It was an inviting spectacle, and not one but was tempted to dash into the water.

All could now perceive with what madness of joy the weary Sahara traveler, athirst and fatigued, must gaze upon the desert oasis.

It must to him seem like new life and joy and gratification. A blessing indeed is the oasis in the great Sahara.

The Chaise rolled into the shady dell and the travelers threw themselves down from the deck to get a drink from a cooling spring in a mossy bank.

"Begorra, I'd loike a shwim mesilf in that pond," declared Barney. "Shure, it luks moighty invoitin'."

Others shared Barney's opinion. Still nobody attempted to make it literal.

About the edge of the pool there were marks of camel's and horses' feet, where large caravans had driven into the water.

For fully an hour the party sojourned in the oasis.

Then Frank cried:

"Come, we must go on our way. We should reach Bikan by Friday. Eh, Dustin?"

"Yes, I should think so," replied the colonel. "If so, within forty-eight hours thereafter we should see the mysterious mirage."

This was really the object of interest in the minds of all. Every one looked forward eagerly to reaching Bikan.

All speed was put on after leaving the oasis.

But suddenly a dark line came into view in the distance, and directly in the path of the Chaise.

The travelers studied it with interest. Frank procured a strong glass and regarded it intently.

"It looks like a body of horsemen!" he said.

"Let me see the glass!" said Colonel Dustin.

Frank gave him the glass.

The colonel studied the distant line of horsemen. Then he suddenly exclaimed with some excitement:

"On my word! It is lucky for us we are not afoot!"

"Why?" asked Frank.

"They are Bedouins!"

"Indeed!"

This announcement created a marked impression upon all. The character of the Bedouins was known to them.

He is really the pirate or lawless highwayman of the desert.

What is worse, the luckless traveler who falls into their clutches rarely escapes with his life. A merciless and mercenary creature is the desert Arab.

But our friends aboard the Electric Chaise had little to fear.

The Bedouins, however, were seen to be in great force, and were riding directly toward the Chaise.

"It looks to me as if we should have a collision with them," said Frank.

"Yes," affirmed the colonel, "there is no doubt but that we will."

"All right," said Frank grimly, "I reckon it will be a bit the worse for them on the whole."

"I think it will too," agreed the colonel. "Certainly there is no reason why we should change our course."

The course of the Chaise therefore was not changed.

It kept straight on, and so did the Bedouins.

A short while sufficed to bring them quite plainly to view.

All were finely mounted and carried long lances.

Picturesque looking fellows they were, but, as was well known, as incapable of being trusted as a rattlesnake.

On they came in a flying cloud of dust. They had sighted the Chaise, and now surrounded it.

It was evident that they regarded it as lawful prey, and reckoned that they had secured a rich prize.

It would have been easy enough for Frank to have put on all speed and run away from the Arabs.

But he did not.

The truth was he was interested in the desert dwellers, and was desirous of getting a good look at them.

The Bedouins, on the other hand, seemed to have the same purpose in view.

They regarded the Chaise as a strange affair.

Colonel Dustin and Wilton were on the main deck. Frank had gone forward.

Suddenly one of the Bedouins rode forward brandishing his spear.

He was a tall, powerfully built man, with long gray beard, being evidently the sheik of the tribe.

"He looks a typical patriarch," said Wilton. "Really, I admire him!"

"He is certainly a magnificent specimen of the desert native," declared the colonel, "but I'll warrant he is one of the most bloodthirsty scoundrels alive!"

"No doubt," agreed Wilton. "Ah, he has opened a parley!"

The Chaise was running at a moderate speed over the sandy plain. The sheik's horse easily kept pace.

That dignitary himself had hailed Frank.

He spoke in the Arabic. Frank did not understand it. Then he used the Turkish tongue.

But this was ambiguous, with its desert vernacular, and Frank tried the French.

Unfortunately the sheik did not understand this. However, he signaled his men and one of them rode forth.

This fellow apparently was the linguist of the tribe.

He spoke French fluently.

"What is your pleasure, monsieur!" he asked. "The great sheik, Ali Babo, wants to know what you do in the desert."

"We are going to Bikan," replied Frank.

"The land of the silver star!" cried the interpreter. "Oh, monsieurs, you are not making war upon our people?"

"By no means!" replied Frank, earnestly. "We would much rather be friends with you."

"Friends, monsieur?"

"Aye!"

The interpreter conveyed this announcement to Ali Babo. The sheik smote his thigh with the palm of his hand, and at once replied:

"No dog of an unbeliever can cross the desert to Bikan without paying tribute to Ali Babo."

This announcement was conveyed to Frank.

The young inventor smiled.

"Your sheik can never exact tribute from us!" he declared. "We are not to be trifled with. We travel well armed. Take the warning!"

The interpreter conveyed this reply to Ali Babo.

It made the sheik very wroth. Time and again he smote his thigh, using high sounding words.

Then he brandished his scimeter and rode once around the Chaise. This done, he paused to note the effect.

It must have been somewhat to his discomfiture that he saw that it had no effect whatever upon the travelers.

The Chaise kept on toward Bikan, and Frank's face wore the same provoking smile.

For a moment the sheik was undecided what to do. Then he authorized his interpreter to say:

"The Great Sheik demands tribute or he will attack the invaders of the holy land of Mahomet."

"All right!" retorted Frank. "You will get the worst of it."

Shrieking with rage, the sheik rode away toward his men. When he reached them a thrilling scene was enacted.

Instantly every man drew his scimeter and the whole troop sprung forward.

With their magnificent Arab steeds on the full gallop, they came down for the machine.

Had our travelers been in a less secure position, they might well have felt some trepidation. But as it was they were safe enough.

Down came the cavalcade at full swing. They made an imposing array in their barbaric costumes.

"Golly!" cried Pomp, "I done fink we bettah gib dem a lily bit of a volley!"

"Begorra, that's thrue, naygur! Phwere is me rifle?"

"No!" cried Frank, authoritatively, "that must not be! Don't shoot one of them. There is no need of taking life!"

"I can imagine how the soldiers of Napoleon must have felt when they were charged by the Mamelukes," declared Colonel Dustin. "Certainly these are a savage looking set."

"Very true," agreed Wilton. "But how quickly they would melt before our American repeaters."

"They would be swept out of existence," declared the colonel. "Yet they are wonderful men."

"The savage will never be able to cope with civilization in the matter of arms," declared Wilton; "but given the same weapons they would be most deadly foes to meet."

"Right you are!" agreed the colonel. "A very formidable foe to battle with."

Frank was at the wheel now.

He was not desirous of coming to close quarters with the Bedouins. So he let out a loop.

The Chaise could easily have run away from the horses. But Frank kept them on even terms for a ways. Yet he did not allow the Bedouins to get too near for safety.

This had its effect.

The Bedouins spurred their horses on madly, yelling and cursing in the Mohammedan way.

But they might as well have spared themselves the trouble.

They could not get to close quarters with the Chaise to save their lives. As a result their horses soon began to tire and the machine to draw away from them.

This infuriated them beyond measure. But this was all the good it did.

In a brief while the Bedouins were left behind in the race.

CHAPTER VI.

A SERIOUS CALAMITY.

The Chaise now increased its speed. Colonel Dustin and Wilton were delighted.

"Ha, ha!" shouted the colonel, "it serves that blustering

sheik right! Why, their horses are but a pinch of snuff in a gale of wind, compared with the Chaise."

"I wonder what that band of rascals think now?" cried Wilton.

"Begorra, they can think phwat they plaze, but they kin niver catch us now!" cried Barney.

"Golly, dat am right," averred Pomp.

The Bedouins were every moment receding in the distance.

They were now but a speck on the horizon, but for all this one peculiar fact was noted.

They kept still in pursuit, hanging in the rear. This fact was noted by all.

"They evidently intend to follow our trail," said Frank, grimly.

"They will have a long way to follow," affirmed Wilton. "I am afraid that they will tire before they overtake us!"

"I don't know about that," said Frank. "Bikan is not such a tremendous distance away. Yet even when we get there, we are not out of the desert!"

"Which is true!" affirmed the colonel, "but if worst came to worst we could give them a fight!"

"Just a bit of a one!" laughed Wilton, "imagine their trying to cope with the electric gun!"

Everybody smiled at this. But now the topography of the desert began to change a trifle.

The mighty even expanse of sand which extended for such a distance became bordered with a horizon of peculiar aspect.

"What is that?" cried Wilton. "It looks like low lying clouds!"

"But it is not," replied the colonel. "We are coming to a hilly part of the desert."

"Hills!" ejaculated Wilton. "Why, I thought the desert was in all parts as level as a floor."

"By no means!" replied the colonel, "on the contrary it is diversified as much as any region in the world. There are hills and valleys, plains and rolling land in abundance."

"But yet all one expanse of dreary, unchanging sand!"

"Certainly! The desert is the desert whether high or low land."

"Is not water apt to lay in some of the low places?"

"To the contrary, water is almost invariably found on the high ground. This is a strange anomaly."

"Unlike any other country on the face of the earth."

"Certainly."

All these were matters of interest to the young reporter. He incorporated them all in his journal of the trip, intending to make use of them at some future day.

Rapidly now the Chaise approached the hills.

There was a dull haze in the atmosphere. It was like a film which seemed to permeate landscape and all, and to be everywhere.

Suddenly Wilton gave a great cry. He pointed to the horizon and shouted:

"Ah, Colonel Dustin, your words are belied. What do you call that?"

The picture beheld was a most entrancing one.

There, framed by the haze, was a view of a fertile slope. There were beautiful fields, streams of water, waving palms and grasses.

It was a vision such as had often made delirious the desert wanderer who had come athirst for many leagues.

"Hello!" exclaimed the colonel; "that will do very well."

"How is this, colonel?" cried the reporter. "We must have reached the verge of the desert."

"No, I guess not."

"No! Why, how do you explain that fertile tract of country? It is too large for an oasis."

"Easy, my boy," replied the colonel, calmly. "That is all a snare and a delusion. There is no such country over there."

Slowly a comprehension of the truth dawned upon Wilton. He gave a little gasp and exclaimed:

"By Jove! the mirage!"

"Exactly," cried the colonel, "that is the seductive scene which has lured many a poor soul to his certain fate."

"But—" exclaimed Wilton, "this is not the mirage we are looking for."

"By no means. The mysterious mirage depicts a city."

"Where then is the region depicted in this mirage?"

"You ask me too much. It may be in Bikan. It may be hundreds of miles away. Wonderful specimen of nature's photography."

"Indeed you are right."

All watched the mirage with deepest interest. But as they drew near it gradually began to fade.

Into impalpable mist it went, and they saw a rugged and wild range of hills before them.

"Beyond those hills is Bikan," remarked the colonel.

"How shall we find a way through them?" asked Frank. "You have been here before, colonel?"

"Indeed, yes!" replied the colonel. "I think yonder rugged head of rock overhangs a pass. Try it."

The Chaise ran rapidly toward the frowning points of rock. As the colonel had said, there was a pass between them.

Into this the machine rolled.

But it had gone but a short distance when there was a sudden jar, a hissing and buzzing sound.

The Chaise stood still.

Frank came out of the engine-room. He looked pale and anxious.

"What has happened, Frank?" asked the colonel.

"We have met with an accident," replied the young inventor.

"An accident?"

"Yes!"

All looked alarmed.

"What is its nature?" asked Wilton.

"Well, to be brief about it," said Frank, "the machinery has broken down."

This was an appalling declaration. Dismayed cries went up.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Wilton, "that is a bad blow. How bad is the break?"

"Is it beyond repair?"

"I cannot say yet," replied Frank. "I must make a closer examination. But we will hope for the best."

Of course there was no other way but to make the best of it. The Chaise could not proceed further for the while.

Frank at once began to search for the break in the machinery.

To the relief of every one, after an hour's work, he declared that it could be repaired, but that with the assistance of Barney and Pomp it would require some hours yet.

However, all were inclined to rest content. Work was at once begun.

Col. Dustin and Wilton were on deck.

In the excitement of the day's incidents the Bedouins had been quite forgotten.

It will be remembered that the last seen of them they were tracking the machine yet.

What was more natural, therefore, than for them to suddenly appear upon the scene.

They rode into the defile all of a sudden.

"Thunder and guns," gasped the colonel, leaping to his feet. "Those fiends have overtaken us!"

Wilton sent a cry of warning down into the engine-room.

In a moment Frank, with Barney and Pomp, came rushing up. A glance was quite enough.

"Fare an' 'ounds!" gasped the Celt, "phwat will we do wid 'em?"

"Did you ever!" exclaimed Frank. "Were they not persistent to follow us thus?"

"They are ugly customers," warned the colonel. "We had better not give them the start."

"Nor will we," muttered Frank.

He saw, however, that the electric gun could not be used without turning the Chaise about, as it was in the bow.

There was no way, therefore, but to depend upon the repeating rifles. These were quickly produced.

The Bedouins indulged in very little ceremony. They almost instantly opened fire.

This fired Col. Dustin's blood. His war spirit was aroused.

"Give it to the black dogs!" he shouted, "don't spare one of them. Exterminate the whole gang!"

No further bidding was necessary.

Barney and Pomp were already at work with their repeaters. The work was lively.

Up the defile came the shrieking Bedouins.

Their charge was impetuous.

If they reached the deck of the Chaise the result might be serious. This must be avoided.

So the repeaters were worked as rapidly as possible. The attacking Arabs went down like sheep.

Yet they seemed game and bound to carry their point. But the pass became literally blocked with their dead horses, and this as much as anything else caused them to come to a stop.

Human courage could not face such terrible fire, and as a result they were compelled to hold back.

They broke into a literal rout and were swept back down the pass.

With wild cheers the defenders of the Chaise kept up the fire.

"We've licked 'em!" cried Colonel Dustin, wildly, "they are not in our class, I tell you!"

"I reckon they've had enough of the Electric Chaise," said Wilton.

But Frank's face still wore an anxious look and he said:

"Don't be too sure!"

"Begorra, they're formin' agin!" cried Barney.

This was true.

But they did not come again to the attack for all this. There was another plan uppermost in their brains.

What this was speedily became manifest.

They disappeared of a sudden, leaving the pass entirely. Some time passed.

While the desert travelers were wondering what this could mean, there came a sudden explanation, and in a most startling manner.

"Howly Vargin!" suddenly screamed Barney. "Wud yez see phwat the black divils are up to."

All looked in the direction indicated by Barney, and for a moment they were dumb with awful fear.

CHAPTER VII.

DEFEAT OF THE BEDOUINS.

The Bedouins had adopted a new plan of action which seemed likely to give them the upper hand after all.

Over the machine hung the heavy brows of the cliff.

Suddenly several of them had appeared upon this. Their fiendish intention was at once plain.

This was in short to demolish the Chaise by rolling heavy bowlders down upon it.

There were plenty of these upon the cliff weighing many tons. Should one of them crash down upon the machine it would wreck it.

Frank Reade, Jr., was the only one in the party with any power to think or act.

He saw at once that something had to be done.

But what?

"My soul!" finally gasped Col. Dustin, "they have got the best of us."

For a moment it seemed so.

Only a lucky circumstance saved the machine. A loud cry escaped Dustin.

"Look out!" he shouted. "There comes the first one!"

Over the verge of the cliff came a mighty bowlder. It weighed tons, and seemed about to crush the Chaise to atoms.

But by the luckiest chance in the world it missed the aim.

It struck the ground not six feet from the machine. It buried itself deep in the sand, and did no harm beyond.

It was a close escape.

A baffled yell went up from the Bedouins. But they had others almost in readiness to drop.

It was at that critical moment that a recollection of an important fact came to Frank Reade, Jr.

The brakes to the Chaise were tightly set. It rested upon a little incline, and these held it.

Frank remembered this. He saw at once that to release the brakes would be to allow the machine to run down the incline with its own momentum.

This would be sufficient to carry it to the end of the pass, where it would be out of harm's way.

The moment this dawned upon Frank he muttered:

"Saved!"

Then he sprang to the brake valve and released them. Instantly the machine started backward down the pass.

Just at that instant another huge bowlder fell.

It struck exactly on the spot where the machine had stood. A more narrow escape could hardly be imagined.

"Jericho!" gasped the colonel. "That was a close call for us!"

In a few seconds the Chaise was out of danger.

The delight of our travelers can hardly be imagined or described in words.

The Bedouins, baffled, yelled savagely and sent a shower of bullets after the Chaise. But these did not the least harm.

Barney and Pomp answered the fire and not without effect. But presently they joined Frank in renewing work on the machinery.

Ali Babo's men did not venture to get within rifle shot again.

They hung about the pass out of range and content to yell their rage at a safe distance.

Frank in the meanwhile made rapid work with the machinery. In a very short while he had it all in working order again.

"We're all right," he shouted, "let her go!"

And away ran the machine up the pass. Before the Bedouins could recover, she was through the place and came out upon the level plain beyond.

"Now for Bikan," cried the Colonel. "We ought to make it in twelve hours."

But darkness was at hand. However, the search-light enabled the machine to keep on.

Also the moon soon hung high in the blue ether. The desert never looked more desolate than by moonlight.

But the Chaise kept on at a swift rate.

Nothing more was seen of the Bedouins. The next morning at sunrise all were on deck.

Col. Dustin pointed out a distant line of buildings of stone, which seemed to spring literally out of the sands of the desert, and cried:

"That is Bikan!"

Of course, all were interested. The little desert town was a strange affair.

Back of it were a few miles of fertile plains, where the inhabitants carried on agriculture in a rude fashion.

Back of this was the undulating country to the wilds of Central Africa, where the Ethiopian held sway.

The southern verge of the Sahara was reached. There were along its border innumerable towns and cities.

Hundreds of tribes and factions dwelt here.

They were ever at war upon each other, and each little city was walled in and a fortress by itself.

This was the case with Bikan.

But the colonel explained that the Bikan race were more friendly with Europeans than any other.

"They will receive us well," he declared, "especially if they think we have come to see the mirage."

"That then is the chief object of interest here?" asked Frank.

"It is!"

"Where do we go to see it?"

"To the Rukan Valley about three miles from here."

"Why not go there at once?"

"Of course we could. But I thought it would be better to treat with the Bikan people first."

"As you please. You are more familiar with the people and their customs than I."

"Well, I think it would be better to treat with them."

"All right."

As the Chaise approached the little walled city of Bikan there was seen to be a great stir.

The people all rushed upon the walls and the gates were closed. It was evident that they distrusted the newcomer.

"They don't know us!" declared the colonel. "We'll give them a view of the American flag!"

This was done.

The Stars and Stripes were run up on the mast over the pilot-house. This had the desired effect.

The appearance of hostility ceased, the city gates flew open and a great crowd of curious people flocked out.

The Bikan natives were not unlike the Moslems of other parts of the desert.

They wore tunics, girdles and turbans, and carried keen scimeters. They were a swarthy-skinned, powerfully-built race of people.

But of all the South Sahara tribes according to Colonel Dustin they were the most peaceable.

They were friendly to all foreigners, and it was here that the colonel had spent so much time in former years.

So there was no hesitation in running the machine directly up to the city gates.

A number of the dignitaries of the town greeted the colonel familiarly in the Morocco tongue which Dustin understood well.

Then Frank and the others were introduced to Hyder Ben Ali and Mustapha Hassan, the leaders of the town. They were quite agreeable Arabs, and bade the whole party welcome to the town.

The machine passed through the gates, and now the people crowded closer about exchanging salutes with the newcomers.

A sort of public fete was held in their honor, and when it became known that they had come for the purpose of discovering the secret city of the mysterious mirage there was some excitement.

Hyder Ben Ali promised all the aid in his power, but took occasion to say:

"There is danger in visiting the Rukan Valley now, Effendi!"

"How is that?" asked the colonel.

"The warlike Sheik Ali Babo has a large force encamped there. He is mustering all the smaller tribes he can find to make an attack upon us."

"Ali Babo!" exclaimed the colonel. "Why, we had a little ruction with him on our way here."

The Bikan ruler was surprised.

"Doubtless he was out scouring the country for reinforcements," he said. "He is a traitorous dog!"

"Then he meditates an attack upon this city?" asked the colonel.

"Yes."

"For what purpose?"

"For plunder and rapine. Our people are peaceful and industrious. The sons of the desert live by plunder. But we shall resist to the last."

"Of course you will, and we shall help you."

The colonel conveyed this information to Frank Reade, Jr., whose brow darkened.

"So that is the purpose of Ali Babo," he said. "We will see about it. I hardly believe he will go very far in his nefarious scheme."

So Hyder Ben Ali was astonished when the colonel announced the intention of proceeding the next morning to the Rukan Valley.

However, the Bikan people were game, and decided to accompany their American allies, though, to tell the truth, they were not a little apprehensive as to the result.

They did not know then the power of the electric gun, or the offensive and defensive resources of the Chaise.

Promptly on time the next morning the party set forth.

Fully six hundred of the Bikan people, armed in a primitive fashion, set forth with the machine.

The Rukan Valley was in fact but a slight depression in the bed of the desert.

There was a small oasis there, and about this the forces of Ali Babo were encamped.

The Americans came in sight of the array of Arab tents spread upon the sands. They made really quite an imposing appearance.

"Well," said Frank Reade, Jr., as he regarded the scene, "there is quite an army of them, is there not?"

"Indeed, yes," declared the colonel. "If it were not for the electric gun I should be afraid of them."

"Indeed! Don't you think the Bikan people would fight?"

"Yes, but they would be as a handful of chaff to these people. They are great fighters, I tell you."

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE LAND.

"Well," said Frank, drawing a deep breath, "we will give them some fighting before we get through with them!"

"I hope so," cried the colonel. "Ah, they have seen us!"

There was seen to be much commotion in the camp of the Arabs below.

They had evidently spotted their foes, and realized the necessity of at once preparing for a defense.

They began to strike their tents, and a great body of horsemen rode out in front of the camp.

Hyder Ben Ali had marshaled his men upon the slope. It was a good position.

Frank ran the Chaise a trifle in advance, and to a point from whence a good shot could be had at the foes.

Then he trained the gun.

The Arabs did not seem disposed to act upon the defensive. Their plan was offensive.

When it became plain that they really intended to attack the newcomers, Frank advised Hyder Ben Ali to hold his men in check.

"It is better to await their attack," he said. "We shall be surer of defeating them."

"As you will, master," replied the Bikan sheik. "You shall lead us."

On came the Arabs now.

They split into three large detachments. One went to the right and left to attack and flank the Bikans.

The third and largest attacked the Chaise in front.

On they came up the slope in full career.

The time had come to act.

Frank was at the electric gun.

He knew this well.

Nor did he lose time.

Quick as a flash he whirled the gun upon its pivot, and sent a shot hurtling to the right.

It struck the ground full in the face of the flanking detachment. The effect was thrilling.

A literal mound of sand was raised in front of the astonished Arabs.

There was an earthquake-like roar, a tremendous cloud of sand and dust rose high in air. The horses of the Arabs became unmanageable.

The entire troop was brought almost to a complete rout. It was for them an unlooked-for intervention.

But Frank lost no time.

Quick as a flash he wheeled the gun to the left, and repeated the shot in the same manner in front of the left detachment.

It brought them to a halt. Then Frank sighted the gun for the oncoming host in front.

In the front rank rode Ali Babo. Straight into the horde of charging Arabs Frank sent the bomb.

The effect was terrific.

Whole lines were mowed down by the fearful explosive as if with a scythe. And shot after shot followed.

Human blood and brawn could stand nothing like that.

The deadly dynamite would have exterminated the whole army of Arabs had they not broken and fled.

The battle was ended almost as soon as it began. It was all owing to the terrific power of the electric gun.

Words can hardly describe the amazement of the Bikanites at this result.

They could hardly believe it.

To see their old foes dispersed in so swift and summary a manner was completely beyond their comprehension. They could not but regard the deadly dynamite gun with amazement mingled with awe.

The Arabs were in full retreat, but Frank followed up his advantage by sending a few more shots after them.

Hyder Ben Ali rode up to the Chaise to express his sincere amazement at the result.

But Frank only smiled grimly and said:

"It was only what they richly deserved. They are a set of scoundrels."

The Rukan Valley was cleared of the rascals, however, which was at least a source of congratulation.

The party could now continue their quest for the secret city. But first it was necessary to wait for the mirage.

"The conditions are favorable for its appearance within

a day or two," declared Col. Dustin, "in fact I know no reason why it might not appear to-day."

The most favorable point in the valley from which to view the mirage was selected and here the party remained in waiting.

The day came on intensely hot. There was just the necessary haze in the atmosphere.

It was a little past high noon when the singular freak of Nature displayed itself.

It was indeed a wonderful spectacle. None in the party had ever seen a mirage equal to it.

Every detail was as life-like and prominent as if viewed in reality.

For over an hour the mirage remained in full view. Then it slowly faded away.

During this time the travelers watched it with interest.

While studying the mirage Frank Reade, Jr., spoke never a word. But after it had vanished Col. Dustin approached, and said:

"Well, Frank, what do you think of it?"

"A very wonderful manifestation."

"Is it not?"

"Yes."

"Can you form any opinion as to the possible location of the secret city?"

Frank slowly inclined his head.

"I think so," he said, "it is somewhere to the south of us!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the colonel, with interest. "Upon what do you base your calculations?"

"Well," said Frank, seriously, "did you notice a flag on one of the buildings? Well, that flag has given me the cue. If it was fanned by a southwest wind, which is the direction of the wind here, allowing that we do not get a transposed view of the city, it will be found in a spot due south from here!"

The colonel was astonished.

To attempt the location of the city by any such method as this had never occurred to him.

Nor could he quite see through it until Frank with a point of a stick drew a diagram in the sand.

Then he cried:

"On my word, Frank, you are right. The city is to the south of us."

"I believe it."

"Then we ought to go thither."

"We will start at once."

When this announcement was made to Hyder Ben Ali and the Bikanites they expressed their regrets.

But at the same time extended their best wishes for the success of the undertaking.

No time was lost.

The Chaise was at once headed due south. At a very rapid speed it soon left the Rukan Valley far behind.

The travelers were upon the tip-toe of expectancy.

The horizon was constantly scanned as if they expected the secret city to at any time burst into view.

But it was decreed that they were to experience many thrilling adventures before thus being rewarded.

The country now began to undergo a very rapid change.

The desert grew less and less evident. Vegetation began to show itself in stunted quantities.

Steadily the verge of the desert was passed.

But yet all was a wilderness.

This section between Bikan and Rukan was wholly devoid of settlement.

For two days the Chaise kept on its southward way.

Then they came into a land of wavering palms, dense jungles, cooling streams, and far in the distance great mountain chains were seen.

"There is the region which no white man has ever dared penetrate," declared the colonel.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank. "And why not?"

"Ah, it is a region replete with deadly perils. No man could go there and return alive. Even these Arab tribes never venture thither."

"Then it is practically unexplored?"

"Just so."

"That settles it then!"

"What?"

"That is where you will find our secret city of the mysterious mirage. Take my word for it."

"I believe you are right. Certainly every other quarter has been searched."

"As yet I see no reason why this region could not have been safely explored."

"Oh, I dare say we are not yet deep enough into it, but with the Electric Chaise we are doubtless safe enough, anyway."

Frank decided to hold a course for the distant mountain chain.

He had a conviction that the secret city was beyond this.

It might be a premise, but yet he clung to it. So the Chaise kept on for the mountains.

High and bold crowned they were, with heavily wooded slopes. It was not an inviting region to enter.

It became evident, however, very soon, that they were encroaching upon the tropics.

Suddenly, as the Chaise was crossing a grassy plain, a terrific roar was heard, and from a jungle near a monster lion sprang out.

He was plainly in an aggressive spirit, lashing his tail and roaring fiercely. He glared at the Chaise as if inclined to make that the object of his fury.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Dustin, "I never saw the equal of him in my life. Is he not a monster?"

Truly, he was the largest specimen of the king of beasts that any in the party had ever seen.

Had they been afoot or even on horse, they might well have trembled for safety.

But aboard the Chaise all seemed to feel quite secure.

Though the Chaise was obliged to proceed slowly on account of the density of the grass.

While the party were watching the lion he was suddenly seen to undergo a change of aspect.

With a bound he crossed the intervening distance.

"Look out!" shouted Wilton, "he's coming aboard of us."

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECRET CITY.

This was beyond doubt.

Leo had chosen to vent his rage and spite upon the Chaise. Either he took it for some huge monster challenging him or he had seen some one of the party at the windows.

For all had quit the deck.

At first sight they had taken this precaution. It was the wisest and best thing to do.

Indeed, it was lucky that no one was on deck at that moment.

For the lion had come like a flying vulture over the rail and onto the deck.

He dashed at the pilot-house furiously. He struck the barred window stunning blows with his paws.

But of course that did no harm for the window bars were too strong for him to break.

But the inmates of the pilot-house instinctively recoiled with terror, though they were safe enough.

Barney and Pomp secured their repeaters, and were for shooting him.

But the trouble was great to get a good range.

The lion in the meanwhile worked himself into a greater fury.

It was possible that he might have done some serious harm had it not been for his suddenly getting in range.

Barney and Pomp instantly opened fire.

Every bullet struck the mark, but it was not until after they had fired six consecutive shots that a vital part was reached.

The question was then quickly settled, and a dead lion lay on the deck of the Chaise.

The danger now being over, all ventured out on deck.

The dead king of the jungle was viewed with varied sensations. He was truly a monster.

The Chaise had come to a halt, and the question now arose as to what it was best to do with the monster.

"Take off his skin," said the colonel, "the rest of him will make good food for the hyenas."

Accordingly this was done.

Then the carcass was thrown over the rail. The Chaise went on its way.

Beyond the grassy plain they now came to some open woods. It was easy for the machine to thread its way through these.

Troops of monkeys ran chattering through the branches, jackdaws screeched at the newcomers, and a huge serpent hung from a branch and made a blow at the machine as it passed.

They now entered the wildest and strangest land they had ever seen.

There was no longer any doubt but that they were in an unexplored part of the world.

"Certainly," said Frank, "no white man ever penetrated these wilds before. Even the birds and beasts are unacquainted with man."

This, indeed, seemed so. But beyond the forest they now came upon what looked like a miniature Hades.

There were conglomerate masses of rock in all shapes, and representing all sorts of outlandish forms.

There were what looked like the fossil remains of Megatherians and immense saurians of a past age.

"Mercy on us!" cried the colonel. "What are we coming to? What a field this would be for a scientist."

"Indeed, yes!" agreed Wilton, "there is no other place on earth like it in my belief."

"In truth I believe you are right," declared Frank. "Some Smithsonian professor would give a year's salary to delve among these remains."

"All that is left of a past epoch," declared the colonel. "What monsters must have inhabited the earth in those days!"

"You are right," agreed Wilton; "how strange, though, that we find no trace of human remains."

"Don't be so sure of that," said Frank, "they are undoubtedly here."

"Do you believe it?"

"Begorra, there's wan now!" cried Barney.

Instantly the Chaise came to a halt. An astounding spectacle was revealed to the travelers.

Here was a high bank of what had once been marl, but solidified into a species of sandstone.

And there, distinctly outlined in that, were the skeletons of two men in a wrestling attitude.

They were imbedded in the bank, where they had doubtless been for thousands of years.

The story of their death strife would never be known. But they had died together.

Each had his hand at the throat of the other. In this manner they had probably fought until death overtook them.

Doubtless they had sunk into the clayey bank, and this had preserved and fossilized the bones.

But the remarkable thing was their size.

By actual measurement each skeleton was fourteen feet in length.

Allowing for shrinkage, in life these men must have been fifteen feet tall.

"Whew!" exclaimed Wilton, in sheer amazement, "what a race of giants they must have been!"

"Giants, indeed!" cried the colonel. "Why, they were twice the size of our largest giants of to-day."

At this moment a cry from Pomp attracted general attention.

The darky had discovered a curiosity for a fact.

This was an immense stone ax. None in the party could more than lift it from the ground.

"When you bear in mind," said the colonel, "that they doubtless wore axes like that at their girdles, you can realize what an insignificant, effeminate race we are."

"Due to civilization," said Wilton.

"As you will."

"Yet," said Frank, "would you not prefer our civilization and advantages to their barbarous life and strength?"

Nobody was ready to answer this question. In fact it had been propounded rather suddenly.

However, all were intensely interested in his lordship of the barbaric age.

His battle-ax all would have liked to preserve, but it was so intensely heavy that this was not deemed practicable.

So the Chaise continued on its way deeper into this strangest of all strange lands.

And such it was.

At every side new wonders were discovered. In fact, there seemed no end to them.

"I verily believe we are on our way to the secret city," declared the colonel. "This is a fit preparation for it."

"Only the secret city teems with life, while this seems to be the region of death," said Frank.

"That is very true, but I look for a change before long."

And the colonel's prediction was suddenly verified.

A change did come.

Out of the fossilized tract they passed and into one which was a liberal representation of a typical Eden.

The lush grasses, waving palms, shimmering lakes, and blue, hazy hills, with the balmy air, made an entrancing combination.

The travelers were spellbound.

"On my word," cried Wilton, "if I did not know better, I should say I was in Eden."

"It certainly could not have been a more lovely spot," declared the colonel.

The travelers gazed upon the scene spellbound for a time.

Then the Chaise went on through this maze of natural beauty.

Suddenly Frank Reade, Jr., gave a great cry. Instantly all eyes were upon him.

"What is it, Frank?" cried the colonel.

The young inventor pointed to a distant range of hills over which hung a purplish haze.

"As I live!" he cried, "those look extremely natural."

"What do you mean?"

"Why—look sharp! Have you never seen them before?"

The colonel gave a start, and a great wave of comprehension swept over him.

"You are right!" he cried. "Those are the hills of the mysterious mirage."

"You are right!" cried Frank. "And they are just back of the secret city!"

This announcement created a most intense sensation.

Instantly all became excitement aboard the Chaise. It seemed a certainty that the goal of the expedition was near at hand.

"In that event," cried the colonel, "the secret city is just beyond that range of hills!"

"For a fact."

"How shall we get there?"

"We must find a pass. That ought not to be difficult."

"By no means. What is yonder cleft? It looks like a pass."

"We will try it."

The Chaise was sent toward the distant cleft in the azure hills. Before it was reached it was seen to be a pass.

Beyond this they all felt sure they would find the secret city.

It was a moment of deepest suspense and excitement.

Steadily the Chaise drew nearer the pass.

The entrance to the pass was veritably like that to Hades. Words can hardly picture it.

High cliffs rose to stupendous heights upon either side.

There were dark and ghoulish depths, immense yawning caverns, and dizzy spurs on the mountain wall.

Even mystery and intangibility hung in the atmosphere. The sensations of the travelers were of the strangest and past description.

It was all like entering a land of romance, a country of genii like that described in story books.

Through the deep pass the Chaise wended its way.

Suddenly it emerged at the further extremity. A literal new world opened to the travelers.

They beheld a wondrous valley miles in extent, and deep in its heart there was nestled the wonderful city of the mirage.

Fortune was with them. At last, overcoming all obstacles, they had found the long sought city.

CHAPTER X.

THE HABANITES.

It would be impossible to describe the sensations of our travelers, as they gazed down upon the secret city.

They were for a time held speechless and amazed.

It was all like a strange dream. Here was a city which looked like nothing more than the city of fable and old-time romance.

Here were people who knew nothing of the world beyond their fertile valley.

Nor cared less.

It was a literal Utopia out of the world's beaten paths, out of the way of sordid enterprise and grasping civilization.

Here was the ideal life, the ideal people. Why was it not the greatest of earth's wonders?

It was a long while before any of the party ventured to speak.

Then the colonel said:

"I have gained the greatest end of my life!"

"We owe it all to Mr. Reade," said Wilton.

"That we do."

"No, do not say that," said Frank modestly. "I should never have known of the mirage but for you, gentlemen."

"But if you had not invented the Electric Chaise we would never have got here," insisted the colonel.

But the question which now interested all was as to whether the people of the secret city were of a warlike or peaceable spirit.

"I don't know how they will accept this visit," said Frank; "but I hope we can make friends with them."

"How curious that they have been always contented to dwell here in this one spot," commented Wilton.

"Why?" asked the colonel.

"I should think they would want to learn something of the outside world," said the scribe.

"Pshaw! You don't appreciate their idea."

"Why not?"

"Simply this: They are an ideal people. They have all the comforts and joys of life in this earthly Utopia. I fancy heaven is some such place."

"Well," said Wilton, drawing a deep breath, "they may like it, but I am not sure that I should hate to give up New York life for it. I don't believe I am cut out for a saint anyway."

This created a laugh.

But it was decided to descend into the secret city.

There were plenty of signs of life there. Flags were flying and the distant murmur and roar came up on the breeze.

But just as the Chaise moved forward there was a rustling in the jungle near and a horse and rider came forth.

The rider was immediately the cynosure of all eyes on board the Chaise.

"Jericho!" exclaimed Colonel Dustin, and then could say no more.

The desert travelers saw, seated upon the horse, a man of commanding presence, powerful frame and light complexion, light to extreme fairness.

His yellow hair hung down over his shoulders in a cloud, and his beard hung low upon his breast.

His features were regular and handsome. In fact he was of a race whose counterpart was not to be found on earth.

It was evident that from the beginning of time his people had intermingled with no other.

Pure bred he certainly was, and it could be seen easily what an advantage this was.

For instance the American is a conglomeration of other races.

There may be French, Irish, German and English blood all blended in his veins.

But not so with the people of the secret city.

For a moment the horseman regarded the Chaise, but not with any apparent surprise.

There was a benignant light in his eyes and a gentle, kind expression upon his face.

For a moment no word of salute was exchanged.

Then the colonel said:

"Speak to him, somebody."

All eyes turned upon Frank.

The young inventor went to the rail and said in English:

"I am pleased to meet you."

The fair dweller of the secret valley replied in a wonderfully melodious voice.

But his words were unintelligible to Frank.

To the surprise of all Wilton stepped forward eagerly and said:

"On my word, I believe I can talk with him!"

"You!" gasped the colonel.

"Yes."

The young reporter stepped to the rail and addressed the fair stranger. The latter's face lit up.

They exchanged several remarks.

All this was most amazing to the others.

"Great guns!" exclaimed the colonel. "What is the meaning of this? Where did you learn his language, Wilton?"

"Why," said the scribe readily, "that is simple enough. When I was in college I made a great study of dead languages. I have won many prizes in Greek——"

"Greek! Why I can talk Greek; but that is not his tongue."

"I admit that," replied Wilton, "but he talks the Hebrew tongue almost as I learned it."

"Hebrew?"

"Yes."

"Then—then he is an Israelite!"

"No, I do not think so. I do not think this is a branch of the regular Israelite tribe, though it is undoubtedly a pure Hebrew nation. The Israelites were much mixed with the Egyptians and other tribes, you know."

"Then——"

"I believe we have discovered a Hebrew race, pure bred and outdating the history of Israel. They have dwelt in these valleys probably since creation and have never been beyond there."

It was an amazing premise.

More food for thought could hardly be found. Surely such a discovery was remarkable in the extreme.

"God's chosen people," exclaimed Frank, "so we may imagine how the people of Israel looked in the days of Moses."

"Exactly," declared Wilton. "We are apt to consider the Hebrew, the Israelite and the Jew as all one race, dark-skinned, coarse-featured and enemies of Christ. But the original Hebrew was nothing of the sort. Before he became alloyed in dark blood with the black-skinned Egyptians I imagine he was the same as these people."

"Then we have discovered the only pure bred race of people on the face of the earth?" cried Frank.

"Unless we except the Ethiopian, who is, however, more or less alloyed in blood for all that."

It was a wonderful thing to reflect upon.

Wilton continued to talk with the Hebrew, who gave his name as Jashuan.

He said that the travelers were the first visitors to the valleys in many hundreds of years, according to the records.

While his people knew of the existence of other peoples beyond the mountains which environed them, they never sought their acquaintance or made explorations.

If any of their young men had gone into the outer world they had never returned.

Neither did they desire or seek intercourse with the world beyond. They worshiped one God, and lived in His glory.

While visitors to the valley would not be rudely dealt with, or even forbidden a visit to the city, they would not be encouraged to make a stay there.

The people of Habana, as the Hebrew called them, lived there. They cared nothing for the world beyond.

The travelers, it need scarcely be said, were interested.

Here was a race of people almost perfect in Christian faith in practice and in profession. They were almost without sin.

"Gracious!" exclaimed the colonel, "it makes me almost wish I was one of them."

"Bejabers, I'm afther thinkin' not," said Barney.

"And why?" asked Dustin.

"Begorra, I cud niver injy mesilf bein' so good as that. Shure it's being too good altogether."

There was a general laugh at this, but in the meanwhile Wilton had been holding parley with Jashuan, the Habanite, again.

The result was that an invitation was extended the travelers to go down into the city.

Accordingly the Electric Chaise moved forward slowly down the slope.

The city of the Habanites was marvelously like the ancient Jerusalem. It was surrounded by a high wall and there were wide gates.

There were temples and market places, as in the Scriptural city of the Jews. But the Habanites were all a quiet and gentle people.

No word of quarrel or blasphemy was to be heard, and every man was polite to his neighbor.

The desert travelers actually felt abashed in such company, and the colonel remarked:

"I never knew that I was such a black sheep before. Why, the contrast appals me."

"What a lot of lambs these people would be for the wolves of the desert if they should get in here," said Frank.

"You are right," agreed the colonel. "Ali Babo and his men, for instance."

"It would be a terrible massacre. But surely God would never permit such an outrage, for in a measure, I believe these people are His chosen."

The Chaise now drew near to the city gates.

The Habanites were somewhat curious at sight of the newcomers, but did not evince unmannerly surprise nor gather in crowds.

But from the temple came the governor of the city and the high priests to meet the visitors.

At the city gates the meeting occurred. It was a memorable occasion.

Wilton was the interpreter.

The travelers told of the mirage—of their journey thither—of the world from which they came.

All this seemed to interest the aged priests very much. But they were more interested in the Chaise.

CHAPTER XI.

ALI BABO'S TRAP.

Frank showed them over the Chaise, and tried to explain the element of electricity to them.

But the Habanites were hardly able to understand this. It remained to them a mystery.

Then the travelers were taken through the city in parade by the governor and his council.

They were shown through the temples and the high places, and it was to them like being taken back to old Scriptural days.

"I declare," exclaimed the colonel, "I really believe I am dreaming. I can hardly credit my senses!"

"It is not an experience that many can say they have had," declared Frank.

"You are right!"

It is needless to say that the tour through the city was a highly interesting one.

The impressions received were never forgotten by our adventurers.

Three days were spent in the gentle society of the Habanites.

Then Frank announced his intention of making a return to the desert.

"We have accomplished our purpose," he said. "We have discovered the secret city of the mysterious mirage. What else can we do?"

"That is true, agreed the colonel, "there is no object in staying longer that I can see. I for one am perfectly willing to make the return."

The others voiced the same sentiments.

So the intention was disclosed to the Habanites. Whereupon the governor made each one a gift.

This was returned in kind and then leave was taken of the city of the mirage.

Up the long slopes the Chaise made its way. When at the highest point all turned and looked back.

The city looked like a dream nestling down there between the azure hills.

"That is a scene which I will never forget," said the colonel, "truly it surpasses everything I ever saw. It seems to me like a dream!"

Then the Chaise passed through the defile.

Not much was said until they were well into the strange land bordering the Habanite valley.

Then the colonel made a remark.

"It would be an awful pity for some of these savage tribes to find that valley."

"Yes!" agreed Frank. "You are right there, colonel."

"It would mean the pillaging of the beautiful city," said Wilton.

"What a horrible thing!"

"Indeed!"

The colonel clenched his hands and said:

"While their existence is something a little beyond *me* and which I cannot altogether understand or appreciate, and while I do not think their methods could or should ever be adopted by the world at large, I should hate to think of their coming into conflict with the hard world outside."

"Yet some day there is no doubt but that they will."

"That is right," agreed Wilton, "and it is not altogether these tribes of the desert you need fear."

"Ah!"

"There is England, France or Germany, whose methods in every part of the world are unscrupulous. You would see their soldiers in those sacred temples of this perfect Hebrew race before you could say Jack Robinson. It would then become an English, French or German colony or protectorate."

"Which would be a pity, a shame to civilization, for it," said the colonel. "Now, I have a proposition to make."

"What is it?"

"After leaving the Sahara we will pledge ourselves never to give to anybody the route to the mirage city, nor even to commit ourselves in any way that will lead to the place ever being visited again. What say you?"

The motion was carried unanimously.

But this point had hardly been settled when Barney leaped to his feet with a cry of pain.

"Ouch, murther!" he cried. "Shure, it's shot I am!"

Blood was running down his face. In an instant all was the most intense alarm.

But it required only a brief examination to show that the wound was simply a flesh wound.

The bullet had just grazed the cheek, nothing more.

But others followed it. All were glad to seek refuge in the cabin.

"Great Scott!" cried the colonel. "What the deuce does that mean? Who has attacked us?"

Thus far the attacking party had not shown themselves. But now Pomp gave a great shout.

"Golly! I see dem!" he cried. "Dey 'am de Arabs fo' suah!"

The Arabs! Consternation at once succeeded.

It required but a few moments to settle this as a fact. Ali Babo's men were secreted in a copse near.

The Arabs had tracked the Chaise all the way from the desert. But it was not of their own personal danger that the party instinctively thought.

"By Jupiter!" cried the colonel, "suppose they find the secret city? What a close call."

Stern glances were exchanged.

"They must be driven back even if—we have to annihilate the whole of them."

The Bedouins had adopted a new mode of warfare.

They evidently realized the folly and hopelessness of a direct and open attack.

Bush fighting became the order. From coverts about they kept up a fire on the Chaise.

They were able to do this for the fact that the machine could not proceed with all speed owing to the character of the ground.

But even if it could have done so, it would not have been Frank's intention.

His purpose was to settle matters with Ali Babo then and there.

This he proceeded to do.

Wherever one of the Arabs became visible, he was greeted with a rifle shot, and thus the contest went on.

Frank noted one fact.

"I declare," he cried, "their numbers have been augmented. They are in much larger force."

"You're right," agreed the colonel. "Probably Ali Babo has scoured the desert to find all he could!"

Frank laughed.

"They will find that numbers do not count," he cried; "ten thousand of the rascals could not head off the Chaise."

"I would like to see them try," cried the colonel, with flashing eyes. "We must give them a good thrashing, Frank."

"And we will."

Indeed the travelers went to work literally to do this.

The Bedouins, of course, speedily found that they were no match for the Chaise.

But the cunning of Ali Babo now came into play.

He was determined to win the contest if he could. Nothing would have delighted him so much as to have scenred the heads of every man aboard the Chaise.

But this contingency Frank Reade, Jr., was resolved should never come to pass. In fact, he was after the head of Ali Babo.

It had become patent to the Arab sheik, that the only way to overcome his foes was to in some way check the progress of the machine.

For this purpose he employed a cunning scheme.

Through the strange land of fossils the fight was kept up.

Frank was pleased to make it a running fight for a good and sufficient reason.

This was to draw the Bedouins out of that part of the country. Succeeding in this, he believed that they would not be likely to return.

And once out upon the Sahara, where there was open ground, he could wipe the Bedouins out of existence.

Whether Ali Babo guessed his purpose or not, it is not possible to say.

Yet this was doubtless so.

For as the machine entered a deep defile, there was a terrific explosion in their rear.

Great masses of rock came down and blocked the defile behind them. The travelers were astounded.

"Gee whiz!" exclaimed the colonel. "What is that for?"

"Why, they probably meant to engulf us in that heap of bowlders;" suggested Wilton.

"Well, they got left."

"I should say so."

"Probably a mistake in calculation. We ran by too quick."

But the improbability of this surmise was quickly established. The plan of the Bedouins was seen to be of entirely a different order.

For suddenly the Chaise came to a halt.

Progress further was impossible. The defile was blocked in front of them.

This was the clever trick of Ali Babo.

They were entrapped

Already the triumphant yells of the Bedouins could be

lined on the hillsides. They were sure of their prey now as they believed.

The travelers looked at each other in a dubious way.

"Begorra, it's a long-headed crew they are!" averred Barney.

"Golly! I done fink dey reckon on habin' us dis time," said Pomp.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the colonel, "did you ever see the beat of it, Frank?"

"It is evident that we are not done with trouble yet!" said the young inventor; "but I guess we will find a way out of the scrape."

"So long as we have the inventive genius of Mr. Reade with us I do not fear!" asserted Wilton.

But the Bedouins had gathered on the heights above and were keeping up a hot fire.

It was impossible to venture out on deck. There was almost a certainty of being shot to pieces.

Things were getting warm for a moral certainty.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH IS THE END.

The bowlders which blocked the defile were of the largest sort, weighing many tons.

Where the Bedouins were able to get sufficient powder to blow them up was a question.

But it was enough that they had succeeded in doing so.

The party was entrapped for a moral certainty.

How to get out of it was now the question. It seemed to all but Frank a difficult one to handle.

But the young inventor was seldom at a loss for a plan. Nor was he at sea in the present instance.

It was easy to see what would follow if the obstacles in front were not removed.

It was impossibe to go around or over them. The machine would have to remain entrapped in the defile perhaps for months—perhaps forever.

Starvation would certainly be their fate. It truly looked as if Ali Baba had played his winning card.

But Frank Reade, Jr., did not think so.

He wore the same confident smile. The colonel was getting anxious, and ventured to say:

"How is it, Frank? Are we stuck in this place forever?"

"Pshaw!" laughed Frank. "Don't worry about it yet. I think we shall get out alive."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"I have great faith in you."

"Thank you."

"But how do you expect to do it?"

"Well, there is only one way, and it is a very simple one."

"What is it?"

Frank pointed to the obstruction.

"You see that mass of bowlders?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am going to try and reduce them to powder."

"With what?"

"Dynamite."

The colonel looked incredulous.

"That would be all right," he said, "if we could only get out there to set a mine."

"Which I do not intend to do."

The colonel was puzzled.

"I don't understand you!" he said.

"Well, then, I will proceed to illustrate," said the young inventor, coolly. "My success will altogether depend upon whether or not I have dynamite enough. We will hope so."

With which he trained the electric gun upon the bowlders.

The result was awaited with interest. Frank trained the gun on the weakest point in the barricade.

Then he pressed the button.

There was a terrific thunderous roar, and the air was filled with tons of debris.

Where the dynamite shell struck the bowlders they were literally reduced to small fragments.

Again and again Frank fired the gun.

Slowly but surely the mighty barricade began to crumble. It was a fearful exhibition of electric artillery.

The Bedouins could not help but stand and watch it with something like awe.

The terrific roar of the dynamite, the crumbling of the

huge rocks, the awful Titan-like power of the thing, was certainly awe-inspiring.

It was as Frank had said, simply a question as to the quantity of dynamite.

Thus far it had held out well. The huge barricade was rapidly melting.

The colonel was enraptured. He could not help cheering at every shot.

"It takes me back to Gettysburg," he cried. "I never saw anything grander. It makes me think of the artillery fire at Picket's charge."

Frank ran the machine nearer. The barricade was not wholly cleared away, but there was, he believed, enough of it worn away so that he could go over it.

And this proved a fact.

The machine actually ran up over the obstruction and continued on out of the pass.

Ali Babo would have been less than human if he had not been impressed by this wonderful exhibition.

The Bedouins were silent. The machine ran on for a little ways and then Frank began to look anxiously behind him.

"What is the matter?" cried the colonel. "We are outstripping the foe."

"That is not all that I want," said Frank. "I want to draw them after me."

"Ah, I see!"

But it very soon became evident that the Bedouins were following the Chaise.

In fact they once more opened fire. Frank kept the machine on toward the desert.

His time would come when it should be reached.

Soon the first level reaches of sand broke into view. The machine here could have increased its speed.

But Frank instead brought it to a complete halt.

"Put out a white flag, Barney!" he said.

"A parley?" asked the colonel.

"Yes!"

The white flag was put out. Ali Babo was vain enough to fancy that it meant a surrender.

A couple of his men came galloping up.

With one of them Frank opened a parley. We will give it in detail.

"Well, Effendi, are you satisfied now that you cannot conquer the Americans?" asked Frank.

"My master is the great Sheik, Ali Babo," replied the envoy, with dignity. "Allah will deliver you into his hands yet."

"I am afraid not," said Frank, coolly, "but I'll tell you what I called this truce for."

"The servant of Ali Babo waits."

"Good! just continue to wait. Go back and tell your master that he wants to give up chasing us or I'll exterminate him and the whole of you. If he will peaceably withdraw we will call it quits. If not, I'll hunt every one of you to your holes like hyenas."

The envoy rode away.

A few moments later a number of horsemen approached. At their head the great sheik himself was seen. They rode up to within hailing distance.

Then Frank called:

"Well, what is it now?"

The same envoy came forward with a sweeping bow.

"The great sheik is here," he said. "He will harass the Americans no more upon one condition."

"Indeed!" said Frank coolly. "That is very kind. What is it?"

"A tribute shall be paid him of ten thousand piastres."

Frank whistled slowly.

"That's modest," he said. "He really wants ten thousand piastres, eh? Well, you tell him that he will get not a piastre. Let this end it!"

The sheik and his party rode away.

Some time passed.

Then a cloud of horsemen enveloped in dust were seen riding to the eastward.

"There goes the sheik!" cried the colonel. "And he is going without his piastres, too."

Everybody laughed at this. It was, indeed, the sheik and his party.

They had wisely given up the hunt. They were never seen again.

A stop was made at Bikan, and hospitality accepted from Hyder Ben Ali.

But due care was taken to say nothing about the secret city. This was a wise move.

The great object of the expedition had been accomplished.

Our travelers may be pardoned for feeling a bit triumphant. Certainly they had earned their laurels.

Naturally all now began to think of home.

"Home, sweet home," sang Wilton, "be it ever so humble, etc."

So a course was set upon the return across the Sahara. Once more arid sands were about them

---

One day there appeared on the shores of the Red Sea a strange looking vehicle. A small town of Moslemites turned out in force to see it.

In all their lives they had never seen anything like the Electric Chaise.

The nearest approach was an ox cart. The sensation created can therefore be imagined.

The trip across the desert had been fairly successful.

There had been one breakdown, and at one time the travelers fancied they might have to make their way to Cairo on foot.

But Frank Reade, Jr., with his accustomed ingenuity repaired this. But he said:

"This is the last trip of the Chaise, I fear."

"How so?" asked the colonel.

"It is easy to see. Her machinery, being of a very delicate make, is wearing out."

"But can you not put in new machinery?" asked Wilton.

Frank shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't like to build over," he said. "I have plans already for a new invention."

"Hurrah!" cried the colonel. "Success to you, Frank, and may I be able to go with you on the next trip."

The machine ran down to the little quay and watch was kept for the small steamer which was to meet them there and take them back to Suez.

From whence they were to sail for America on a steamer bound for the port of New York.

As they stood on the quay, Col. Dustin said:

"Really, I leave Egypt with some regrets. I know I am not perfect enough to live with the Habanites, and yet their life was a happy one, eh Frank?"

"No doubt," replied the young inventor. "Yet my interests at present are in Reade town, and there I fear I shall be compelled to stay."

"What will be your next trip?"

"That I am unable to say."

"Well," said the colonel, heartily, "when you want another traveling companion, let me know."

"I will."

"Ditto," said Wilton.

Barney and Pomp meanwhile had been having an argument in their own peculiar style.

"Golly! I done fink dis chile glad fo' to git back to Readestown," averred the darky. "Kain't say dat I am nowise stuck on dis country."

"Bejabers, that's quare!" commented Barney. "Whin it's yure native soil."

"Clar' fo' goodness!" ejaculated Pomp, "how yo' do keep dat goin'. Dis ain't mah native soil no mo' dan it am yo's."

"Be me sowl, how do yez make that out?"

"Suah, I'se an American, sah. I wuz bo'n in ole Kyarline, an' I don' want no mo' insinuations from a low-down, po' white trash Fishman like yo'."

This was just what Barney was looking for.

"Whurroo!" he yelled, "yez hev insulted an O'Shea. Shure, yez can't do that without payin' fer it."

"Don' care nuffin' fo' dat. If yo' want yo' pay jes yo' cum along an' git it."

Then the two jokers closed in a rough and tumble wrestle.

Of course the natives congregated about thought they were in earnest and ran to the spot with chattering cries.

Now it happened that Barney and Pomp were dangerously near the edge of the wharf.

In their excitement neither noted this and suddenly they reeled and went over the edge.

Down they went kersplash into Red Sea water. When they came up puffing and panting they scrambled out with ardor cooled.

A chorus of haw-haws greeted them and looking up they were abashed to see Frank Reade, Jr., and the others laughing at them.

This was enough for them.

With wilted pride and garments they slunk away to the

cabin of the Chaise to get restored. A few moments later a cry went up:

"Here comes the steamer!"

The machine was taken quickly apart and packed in sections aboard the steamer.

Then all embarked.

In due time they reached Port Said. From there they went to Alexandria and boarded the American-bound steamer.

A propitious voyage it was across the Atlantic. To dwell upon its incidents would be idle.

In due time New York was reached. Here Wilton returned to the employ of the News Syndicate, and the colonel adjourned to the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

There, to a coterie of kindred spirits, he never tires of telling of his experiences in the far East with Frank Reade, Jr., in quest of the secret city of the mysterious mirage. And this, dear reader, ends our story.

THE END.

Read "LATITUDE NINETY DEGREES; OR, FRANK READE, JR.'S MOST WONDERFUL MID-AIR FLIGHT," which will be the next number (61) of "Frank Reade Weekly Magazine."

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